Multi-agency Bereavement and Postvention Checklist with Step-by-Step Guide for Schools

Content warning: The content of this needs assessment may be emotionally challenging as it discusses suicidality and self-harm.

Support is available:

- Samaritans – a listening service which is open 24/7 for anyone who needs to talk. Call 116 123 for free

- Shout – a free confidential 24/7 text service offering support if you're in crisis and need immediate help. Text the word 'Shout' to 85258

- You are not expected to counsel residents or resolve mental health crises.
- Your role is to listen, respond appropriately and connect the resident with support services.
- You are not responsible for the actions a resident may take, including if they decide not to seek help.
- By encouraging the resident to seek help or contacting emergency services, when necessary, you have done what could reasonably be expected.

Scope, Purpose and Aims

This document provides a coordinated, multi-agency bereavement (including postvention) framework following the sudden and unexpected death of a school-aged child or young person. Although written with death by suicide in mind, some of these processes will also apply to sudden or natural deaths (e.g. infectious disease) and accidental deaths.

Postvention: *support provided for anyone affected by a death by suicide*

The aims of the multi-agency response are to:

- Coordinate bereavement support and postvention activity at a multi-agency level
- To support schools in responding safely and sensitively
- Monitor and identify potential suicide clusters (where relevant)
- Safeguard children and young people most affected
- Ensure consistent communication with families and the wider community
- Capture learning to improve future responses

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Child Death Review Process

All child deaths, including those by suspected suicide, are subject to the statutory Child Death Review process, which includes four main stages:

1. Immediate decision making and notifications
2. Investigation and information gathering
3. Child death review meeting by only professionals directly involved in care
4. Review of child deaths at the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP), which is an independent, multi-agency group

In the event of a suicide cluster, the Havering Public Health team lead the local multi-agency response in line with:

- The North East London Cluster Suicide Cluster Prevention Response Plan
- National guidance on responding to suicide clusters; national guidance highlights that deaths in settings vulnerable to imitation (e.g. schools) require a timely and preventative response

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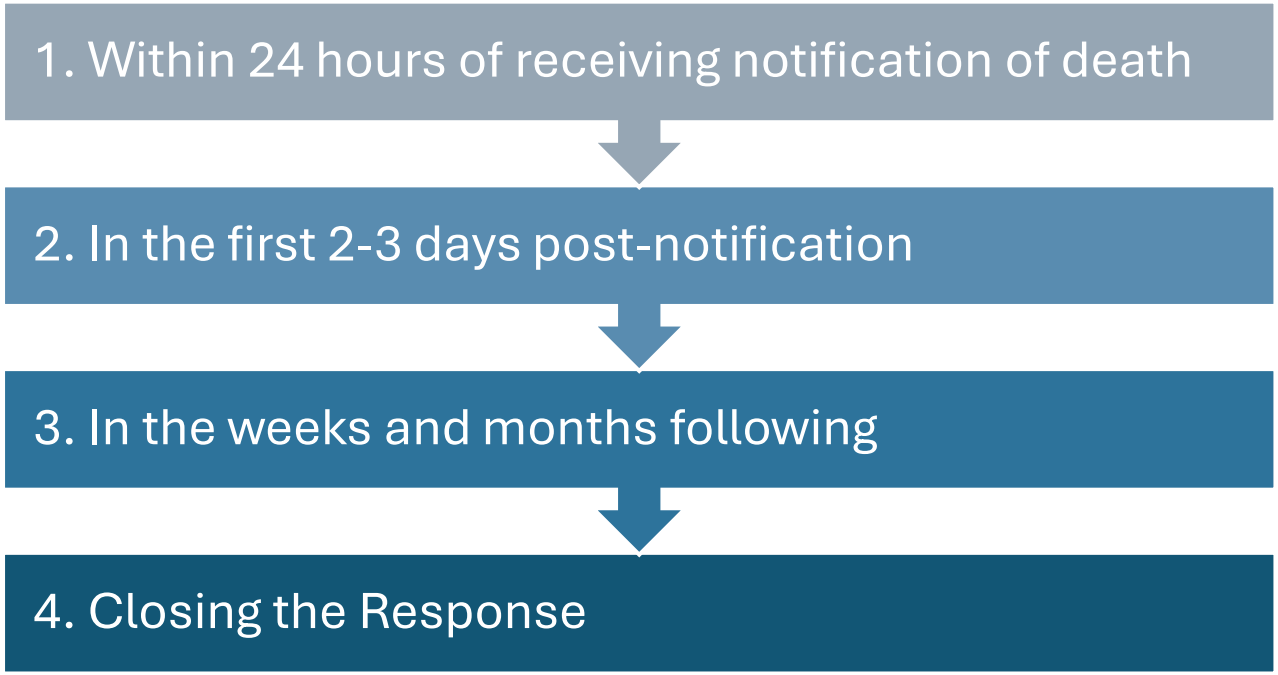
Four-Point Bereavement and Postvention Checklist with Step-by-Step Guide for Schools



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1. Within 24 hours of receiving notification of death

Checklist	Action	School Role
☐	Children's Services to confirm key facts with appropriate agencies before any information is shared	Do not communicate with staff, pupils or parents
☐	Upon notification of a death, Children's Services to contact headteacher	Nominate a senior member of staff as the School Bereavement Support and/or Postvention Lead
☐	School Bereavement Support/Postvention Lead to establish a core school response team, including headteacher (or delegated senior lead, safeguarding lead, pastoral lead, SENCo – when relevant)	Core team to clarify what information can be shared in line with family's wishes, who will communicate with staff, pupils and parents, and the immediate support plan for directly bereaved pupils (e.g., child of a deceased parent) which includes contacting schools where siblings attend
☐	School Bereavement Support/Postvention Lead to signpost to Educational Psychology Service	Make initial contact and offer pastoral support
☐	CDOP Manager[1] to alert multi-agency response group and gather availability	Provide contextual information (year group, siblings, clubs or other group activities, involved agencies, known vulnerabilities to CDOP Manager)
☐	School Bereavement Support/Postvention Lead to identify pupils and staff most likely to be directly affected	Begin internal risk assessment and identify vulnerable pupils (e.g., previous bereavement, self-harm history[2])
☐	*If suspected suicide*, Public Health team to consider whether criteria for a formal suicide cluster response are met. If met, Public Health to form initial multi-agency postvention meeting. If School becomes aware of attempted suicide and/or hospital admission, school to refer to Havering MASH.	Share concerns about peer networks or emerging risks. These can be risks of future deaths by suicide, not only ones that have already occurred

[1] This lead will be Public Health if the death is a suspected suicide
[2] Resources on understanding self-harm, if needed: Leaflets and practical resources | Suicide prevention and self-harm | London Borough of Havering

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2. In the first 2-3 days post-notification

Checklist	Action	School Role
☐	CDOP Manager to hold an initial multi-agency response meeting to decide coordinated communication and support plan[3]	Attend and provide contextual information
☐	School Bereavement Support/Postvention Lead to review relevant guidance to prepare communications	Ensure: • Clear, factual, age-appropriate language • Avoid euphemisms (e.g., "gone to sleep") • Maintain open dialogue with bereaved child and parents • If suspected suicide, use non-sensational, factual language, avoid any description of method and ensure staff feel confident responding to difficult questions and review of existing suicide prevention and self-harm guidance before communication
☐	School Bereavement Support/Postvention Lead to implement coordinated communication plan to staff, pupils, parents	Deliver staff briefing and send agreed parental communication • Samaritan's Step by Step offers a postvention programme specifically for educational establishments. You can contact the team here: Contact the Step by Step team | Samaritans • Please see Appendix for a template to notify pupils, parents and carers
☐	School Bereavement Support/Postvention Lead to implement pupil support spaces (e.g., drop-in space)	Identify safe spaces; allocate trained staff; supervise appropriately
☐	Pastoral Lead and School Bereavement Support/Postvention Lead offer targeted support to bereaved individuals	Schedule sessions for staff and targeted pupils; ensure daily or twice-daily check-ins for directly bereaved pupils and flexible expectations regarding work and attendance
☐	School Bereavement Support/Postvention Lead and Children's Services to review safeguarding concerns	Update safeguarding records and escalate concerns appropriately; ensure safeguarding information is included in transition planning if vulnerable pupils are moving schools
☐	*If suspected suicide*, Public Health Team to ensure media and social media guidance is shared	Review shared guidance and monitor for emerging risks, memorials or unsafe messaging

[3] If suspected suicide, Public Health to lead cluster plan during meeting

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3. In the weeks and months following

Checklist	Action	School Role
☐	School Bereavement Support/Postvention Lead to share contact details of child-focused support services for families and pupils and guidance to parents on talking to children about death	Circulate via parent email, website and pastoral teams, including Papyrus Hotline
☐	Pastoral Lead and School Bereavement Support/Postvention Lead to continue monitoring pupils identified as vulnerable	Maintain check-ins
☐	School Bereavement Support/Postvention Lead to review attendance, behaviour and safeguarding data	Escalate concerns appropriately
☐	School Bereavement Support/Postvention Lead to ensure staff members are supported, including themselves	For staff are supporting bereaved pupils: • Offer regular supervision (internal or external) • Provide reflective space • Recognise cumulative impact if multiple deaths affect one cohort
☐	CDOP Lead to coordinate another multi-agency response meeting, if needed, to update on developments	Provide relevant updates

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4. Closing the Response

Checklist	Action	School Role
☐	School Bereavement Support/Postvention Lead and Pastoral Lead to plan for significant dates (anniversary, inquest, birthdays)	Prepare staff and monitor pupil wellbeing
☐	CDOP Lead to review need for ongoing multi-agency meetings. If closed, a plan should be made for implementing lessons learned	Contribute to review
☐	All to ensure gradual step-down of targeted support	Maintain routine safeguarding processes

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Appendix A - Template for notifying pupils

Pupils: This script could be provided to all staff to be shared with all pupils in the school.

[Today/yesterday] the school was given the very sad news that on **[Insert here]**, one of our pupils died unexpectedly. All of us are thinking of **[his/her/their]** family and friends. Some pupils in our school, particularly [**his/her/their]** friends in Year **[Insert here]** will find this news very difficult. Other pupils, not just close friends, are also likely to be upset, perhaps because it reminds them of another sad event in their own life. A support room has been set up in **[Insert here]** for any pupils to go to if they need to. Someone will always be available in the room for the coming days.

A notice is going home today to inform your parents/carers, so they will understand if you want to talk with them today or sometime in the future. Remember to use the normal signing out processes if you need to leave the school grounds, and if you are approached by anyone asking for information, please tell them they should speak with **[Insert here]**.

Please be sensitive to people's feelings, look out for each other and let a teacher or your parents know if you are worried about anything or anyone.

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Appendix B - Template for notifying parents/carers

***Letter to parents/carers* - Consent from the parents/carers of the deceased must be given if the deceased pupil's name is used.**

Dear parent/guardian,

I am writing to you with some sad news about a member of our school community. One of our Year **[Insert here]** pupils died unexpectedly **[yesterday/today/Saturday/during the holidays].** Our thoughts are with the pupil's family and friends.

Today and over the coming weeks, you may be concerned about child's reaction or how they express their feeling about this news. These are likely to be part of the normal grieving process. Many pupils will wish to talk with their parents/carers and I encourage you to let your child know that you are aware of this death and that you will listen to their concerns at any time they wish to share them. Two important messages to promote are that all of us can seek help from others if needed and that young people should tell an adult if they are worried about a friend's well-being.

Our school will be concentrating on supporting our pupils and staff over the coming months. This means, among other things, returning the school to normal routines as soon as possible whilst recognising that pupils may be affected by this event for some time to come. If your child has already existing support from a mental health professional, then you should ensure this information is passed on to them.

Please feel free to contact the following staff if you have any concerns about your child. Contacting the nominated staff member is an important way of ensuring you receive consistent and accurate information and for us to be aware of all any parental concerns:

Staff member #1 on

Staff member #2 on

Sincerely,

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Appendix C – Link to PAPYRUS' *Building Suicide-Safer Schools and Colleges: A guide for teachers and staff*

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